TIPPING THE SCALES:

HOW DEEPLY MEANINGFUL WORK INCREASES WORK-RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL VALUE HOMOPHILY WITH CLOSE OTHERS

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ABSTRACT

How is work-relationship conflict experienced by people in deeply meaningful work, those who experience both self-actualization and self-transcendence through work? Drawing upon in-depth interview data with 82 international aid workers, I uncover two distinct mechanisms. First, people who find their work deeply meaningful experience more *boundary inhibition* around work practices than their colleagues, increasing their absence and unreliability to close others (e.g. spouse, family, friends). However, when close others similarly perceive deeply meaningful work as important – what I call *occupational value homophily* – it fosters an emotional connection that ameliorates the strain of time-based and trust-based conflict. Conversely, contexts of *occupational value heterophily* engender an emotional distance that exacerbates the strain of time-based and trust-based conflict, resulting in a torturous situation I call *work-relationship turmoil.* These findings highlight the crucial roles played by boundary inhibition and relationship context in moderating the experience of work-relationship conflict for those in deeply meaningful work.

Keywords: boundary inhibition; deeply meaningful work; occupational value homophily; work-relationship conflict; work-relationship turmoil

> At work, all these people are really smart, and inspiring, and great. But there is a dark side of the work. I've seen, in this industry, a lot of divorces and messed up families, a lot of people who gave up personal opportunities, people who had good relationships whose relationships never came to pass, who didn't get married, or people who were married and their marriages fell apart because of people's commitment to this job. That's the dark side of the work. [M07]

Across occupations and industries, employees increasingly desire work that feels meaningful (Hurst, 2014; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002) as it provides fulfilment (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010; Kahn, 2007), enjoyment (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997), and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001). We also know that people who experience their work as meaningful can feel a strong devotion to their work, such that it consumes their lives (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Shantz, & Soane, 2017; Cardador & Caza, 2012; Schabram & Maitlis, 2016), including accepting lower pay, working in dangerous conditions, and spending more time at work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Vinje & Mittelmark, 2007). What are the implications, then, for their relationships outside of work? Although research has alluded to the work-life interface broadly in meaningful work (see, for example, McCrea, Boreham, & Ferguson, 2011; Munn, 2013; Tummers & Knies, 2013), we still lack an understanding of when, why, and how meaningful work causes stress and strain in close personal relationships, leading to a concept I call "work-relationship conflict". These questions are of considerable importance because people increasingly desire meaningful work (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002) and work-relationship conflict has significant negative implications for employees and their employers (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). To advance this inquiry, this paper is guided by the following research question: *How is work-relationship conflict experienced by people in deeply meaningful work?*

In order to better understand when deeply meaningful work turns to the "dark side," it is necessary to take a close look at the lived experience of workers in a setting that enables the possibility for deeply meaningful work and that highlights work-relationship conflict. This requires, first, defining meaningful work. Though the emergent status of meaningful work scholarship has not yet resulted in an agreed upon definition, most scholars generally agree that it entails both subjective components, enabling self-actualization, along with socially-oriented components, enabling self-transcendence (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Despite this comprehensive conceptual understanding, however, the dominant focus in most empirical study of meaningful work has been on self-actualization (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). To extend prior research, I suggest that work can be experienced as *deeply meaningful* when both self-actualization and self-transcendence are fulfilled through work. International aid work provides an optimal empirical settings that holds the possibility for deeply meaningful work, but where participants experience varying levels of meaningfulness from their work. Moreover, the high work and travel demands in the industry render work-relationship conflict salient (Moen, Lam, Ammons, & Kelly, 2013; Williams & Boushey, 2010).

Drawing upon in-depth retrospective narrative interview data with 82 international aid workers, I specifically analyze workers' experience of work-relationship conflict within close personal relationships. I define close relationships as emotionally intimate relationships with a range of partners (including family, friends, or spouses, henceforth "close others") in which two people understand, validate, and care for one another (Reis & Shaver, 1988).[1] I develop a conceptual model that highlights how work-relationship conflict is experienced by people in deeply meaningful work, uncovering two distinct mechanisms.

First, I find that respondents who experience deeply meaningful work become reluctant to scale back, resulting in absence and unreliability in their personal relationships and engendering time-based and trust-based work-relationship conflict. In comparison, those who find their work less meaningful enact reasonable boundaries around their presence at and availability to work, enabling better work-relationship balance. Uncovering the mechanism of boundary inhibition helps to explain why respondents struggled to maintain work-relationship boundaries, a dominant prescription for alleviation of work-relationship conflict (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Second, I find that when people in deeply meaningful work share with close others similar beliefs about the importance of one's work, a concept I call *occupational value homophily,* it creates an emotional connection as the close other appreciates that the worker's absence is in service of self-transcendent aims they agree are important, and validates the worker's self-actualization through their work. While these work-induced emotional connections cannot eliminate underlying work-relationship conflict, they do moderate the experience, providing an emotional counterbalance that tips the scales into a less negative direction. Alternatively, in relationship contexts of *occupational value heterophily*, an emotional distance results as the close other doesn't find the self-transcendent aims important and simply resents the worker's absence, while the worker feels de-valued by her relationship partner as she perceives her work as an expression of self-actualization. This emotional distance is compiled on top of time-based and trust-based conflict, tipping the scales towards deeply painful resentment and emotional turmoil, which I call *work-relationship turmoil*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deeply Meaningful Work

Work is a complex social phenomenon. It can serve as an avenue for the expression of one's self and a way to enact deeply held values, potentially a core component of the search for a meaningful life (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Hughes, 1958). The possibility of work serving as a domain for meaningfulness has long occupied philosophical thought and scholarly interest (Lips-Wiersma & von Hirschberg, 2017), however the emergent status of research on meaningful work has not yet resulted in an agreed upon definition. Most scholars generally agree, however, that meaningful work entails both subjective components, rooted in a psychological paradigm, along with socially-oriented components, rooted in a more culturally-attuned sociological paradigm (for example, see Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra, & Beersma, 2017; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014; Rosso et al., 2010; Wolf, 2010).

The subjective perspective on meaningful work locates meaningfulness in the individual's relationship to their work (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). This perspective involves the fulfillment of needs, motivations, and desires that result in *self-actualization* and expressing one's full potential. Many scholars emphasize an identity-component of this perspective, wherein meaningful work can be a vehicle to developing and becoming one's self (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012), enabling one to answer the question, "does my work reflect and fulfill who I am?" (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017, p. 111). Complementing the subjective paradigm of meaningful work, a socially-oriented perspective derives the sense that work is meaningful through attention to social, cultural, and institutional norms that convey the social value of one's work (Becker & Carper, 1956; Bellah,

Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996; Weber, 1958 [1905]), helping to answer the question, "why is my work worthy?" (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017, p. 111). This perspective entails a sense of *self-transcendence* as one performs work that is of value to others (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012).

Given the dominant focus on subjective components in most study of meaningful work, with less research that considers the social value of work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017), I call work that includes *both* self-actualization and self-transcendence "deeply meaningful work" (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). The appreciation for self-transcendence as a component of meaningful work has been taken up by a stream of research on "callings", a sub-type of meaningful work that is, "endowed with a powerful sense of being right and good and necessary" (Baumeister, 1991, p. 126), paying attention to how the social value of the work provides meaningfulness. Where the current study departs from research on callings, however, is that much research on callings also includes a third component for work to be considered a calling, that of a summons, "experienced as originating beyond the self" (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427). This component of callings suggests that one's work involves a fate or destiny which is not readily apparent, and therefore must be discovered or found. In an effort to move beyond the more narrow definition of a calling, but to support a more comprehensive definition of meaningful work, I suggest that work can be experienced as *deeply meaningful* when both self-actualization and self-transcendence are fulfilled through work. Moreover, when there is consistency across domains of meaningfulness (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Bailey et al., 2017), in this case a synergy between self-actualization and self-transcendence, it leads to the most deeply meaningful work.

Despite the positive effects of meaningful work (Berg et al., 2010; Kahn, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), research has begun to demonstrate significant sacrifice

and conflict experienced by people in meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2017). This research suggests that deeply meaningful work, especially, can be a double-edged sword, wherein work devotion can lead to personal depletion (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Vinje & Mittelmark, 2007). Existing studies that have examined this sacrifice have focused primarily on people who feel "called" to their work, identifying that a sense of "moral duty" leads zookeepers and community health nurses alike to sacrifice pay, physical safety, and time, resulting in severe personal exhaustion and burnout (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Vinje & Mittelmark, 2007). We still lack an understanding, however, of how personal sacrifice in deeply meaningful work extends to close personal relationships, engendering work-relationship conflict. Research that has alluded to the work-life interface broadly in meaningful work has led to inconclusive results. For example, McCrea and colleagues (2011) studied nearly 3000 public sector employees in Australia and found that meaningful work slightly reduced work-life conflict, while Munn (2013) argues that the presence of work-life conflict makes work feel less meaningful. We need a richer understanding of the mechanisms behind work-relationship conflict for those in deeply meaningful work to begin to tease this apart. To survey known mechanisms for work-relationship conflict I examine two bodies of related literature: the psychology of close personal relationships and work-family conflict.

Close Personal Relationships and the Work-Relationship Interface

Whether with family, friends, or romantic partners, relationships are the ties that bind and create social meaning in life (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Historically, the single most important factor in making life meaningful has been engagement in close relationships, fulfilling an intense need to feel connected to others in an enduring manner (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, this emotional connection – the warmth of attachment between two people –

increases as people share common values with one another, making social interactions even more rewarding (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). In contemporary society, however, people spend more time at work and the close relationships that provide emotional and instrumental support can become eroded (Kossek, Kalliath, & Kalliath, 2012).

Relationships require time and attention to initiate, maintain, and nurture (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), and as a result, relationship quality is found to increase with physical co-location and temporal reliability, and to decrease with physical absence and a lack of dependability (Fletcher et al., 2000; Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002). Scholars that study the work-family interface acknowledge an ongoing negotiation for finite time and energy between work and family that often results in a depleting effect on non-work roles and responsibilities and engenders conflict, often referred to as work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict has a negative impact on marital and family satisfaction (Allen et al., 2000), and is strongly associated with lower quality relationships (Fellows, Chiu, Hill, & Hawkins, 2016). When stress and strain arise in a relationship as a result of the work being performed by of one or both people in the relationship, I call this *work-relationship conflict*. When work-relationship conflict arises are a result of greedy organizations demanding more time and attention from employees (Coser, 1974), I refer to this as *time-based* work-relationship conflict.

Complementing time-based work-relationship conflict, the increased prevalence of precarious work offers unique challenges for work-relationship conflict. Precarious work is characterized by both unpredictability and increased mobility (Cresswell, Dorow, & Roseman, 2016; Kalleberg, 2009), and scholarship has noted that precarious work negatively impacts reliability to close others (Henly & Lambert, 2014), eroding trust within relationships (Fletcher et al., 2000; Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002). As a result, when relationships are negatively impacted

by the lack of dependability incited by precarious work, I refer to this as trust-based work-relationship conflict.

One possible mechanism to explain work-relationship conflict is offered by research on attention residue (Leroy, 2009; Leroy & Schmidt, 2016). This scholarship has revealed that people need to stop thinking about one task in order to fully transition their attention and perform well on another, suggesting that one needs to fully disengage from work in order to be wholly present for a close personal relationship. The ability to completely disengage is ever more challenging, however, as boundaries between work and home become more permeable (Nippert-Eng, 1996), especially for work travelers (Lirio, 2017), suggesting that the impact of attention residue may be increasingly pernicious.

On a more positive note, research has also found that support or resources from close others may reduce the strain of work-relationship conflict (Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999; Barnett et al., 2012; van Steenbergen, Kluwer, & Karney, 2014; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). For example, a self-report survey study of 600 couples with at least one member in military service found that the negative impact of work-induced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on marital satisfaction was buffered if the spouse perceived the worker's job was meaningful (Bergmann, Renshaw, Allen, Markman, & Stanley, 2014). Relatedly, Ilies et al. (2011) identify that when a worker can inform their spouse about positive events at work, it improves their relationship through a process they call work-family interpersonal capitalization. These studies, however, do not predict what would happen in a counterfactual situation. For example, in the absence of work-family interpersonal capitalization or when the spouse does not see the work as meaningful, do these situations result in the status quo, or do they further

exacerbate the conflict? To advance this inquiry, this paper is guided by the following research question: *How is work-relationship conflict experienced by people in deeply meaningful work?*

METHODS

Research Context

To examine how people in deeply meaningful work experience work-relationship conflict, two criteria are necessary – 1) the context must offer the possibility for deeply meaningful work, but enable variation in the extent to which people view their work as meaningful, and 2) participants must experience salient work-relationship conflict. International aid work fulfills both of these criteria. First, as I detail more in the findings section, international aid work offers the possibility for deeply meaningful work by offering opportunities for both self-actualization and self-transcendence. Second, aid work is also an extreme case of work-relationship conflict for multiple intersecting reasons. It is a prototypical "greedy institution" (Coser, 1974) with high work demands that routinely spill into evenings and weekends (Moen et al., 2013). Furthermore, aid work is precarious, with an unpredictable work flow that asks employees to be immediately available (Henly & Lambert, 2014), coupled with irregular travel which demands extra flexibility from close others, especially if they are parenting (Mäkelä, Bergbom, Saarenpää, & Suutari, 2015; Saarenpää, 2015). I exploit this setting to develop theoretical mechanisms on work-relationship conflict with broad implications for people in deeply meaningful work.

Data Collection

I obtained extensive access to the full staff of four medium- to large-sized international aid organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. Given the relative paucity of organizational and institutional support for workers and their families in the United States, work-family conflict

is much higher in the U.S. than elsewhere in the developed world (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Williams & Boushey, 2010). I selected the organizations in order to generate a diverse population. Two of the organizations specialize in scientific-technical approaches to aid work: legal aid and conservation science. The other two are generalist organizations, providing both long-term development and short-term humanitarian relief work.

I conducted a detailed survey which I sent to a probability sample of people involved in program work, as identified by the human resource department within each of the organizations. This survey resulted in a response rate of 43% (n=298). From this population, 82 individuals agreed to be interviewed and are generally representative of the broader survey population. Table 1 provides summary characteristics for both the survey population and the interview sample, identifying gender differences. Within the findings, the gender of respondents is indicated with the first letter of their respondent code, "F" for females and "M" for males. (In the Appendix, Table A1 provides individual characteristics on the interview respondents.)

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

In accordance with the industry-wide response to critiques of neo-colonialism that the older expatriate model of human resourcing engender (Escobar, 1994), 73% of the interview population were based in the home office in Washington D.C., while 27% were based overseas, though nearly all respondents traveled extensively for work. Interview respondents ranged in age from 28 to 74 with a mean age of 43, and were 53% female. Given all of the organizations' studied had geographic headquarters in the United States, nearly two-thirds of the interview population is American, with the other third originating from among 22 different countries. Furthermore, 73% of the non-American respondents were men, displaying the influence of gender norms on women's employment globally.

I collected all interview data myself, in person or via Skype. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and over two hours, with the average interview lasting around 80 minutes. Working with an uploaded copy of their CV, I asked respondents to narrate each transition in their career history, discussing what was going on for them professionally and personally at those transitions. This strategy combines critical incident techniques developed to measure an individual's work values (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959) with well-validated means of exploring life narratives (McAdams, 1993), enabling me to probe the extent to which they found their work meaningful, as well as any work-relationship conflict that they experienced during each job spell.

Data Analysis

The insights in this paper emerged from a grounded theoretical approach and research design (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), informed by a broad interest in the work-life interface in deeply meaningful work. Iterating among in-depth coding and analysis of each participant, comparisons across participants, connections to the literature, and emergent model building (Eisenhardt, 1989; Langley, 1999; Ravasi, 2017), this iterative process enabled me to identify each of the key concepts in the resultant conceptual model. Throughout the data collection I observed significant tension with respect to respondents' satisfaction with both their work life and their home life. The most salient non-work considerations that respondents expressed, by far, were close personal relationships, which I came to call, *work-relationship conflict*. I utilized the emergent theme of work-relationship conflict to inductively search for patterns when international aid workers experienced this conflict, identifying that high demands at work (and corresponding absence in personal relationships) and availability to unpredictable work (and a corresponding lack of dependability and unreliability in personal relationships) led to work-relationship conflict. Given the alignment of the data with the scarcity hypothesis (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), I further

investigated why respondents were so reluctant to scale back on work – a common approach to managing work-life conflict in general (Becker & Moen, 1999) – despite giving rise to such conflict in their close personal relationships.

As I analyzed the data a second time, I identified that respondents who experienced greater work-relationship conflict also tended to find their work most meaningful. I therefore utilized the literature on meaningful work to identify and code perceptions of self-actualization and self-transcendence through work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). When workers experienced both self-actualization as a result of identity fulfillment through work and self-transcendence arising from the fulfillment of personal values from work (n=70), I found that they had a very difficult time erecting boundaries that would limit their dedication to work and alleviate their work-relationship conflict, a concept I came to call *boundary inhibition*. In contrast, people who perceived their work more as a job or a way to pay the bills, but not necessarily a site for self-actualization or self-transcendence (n=12), were more comfortable maintaining boundaries and limiting their availability to work. As a result, they experienced reduced work-relationship conflict.

Through the second pass of the data, I also identified an emergent finding – that some established couples were able to maintain relational harmony even in the face of work-relationship conflict arising from absence and unreliability. In the third pass through the data, I examined these outlier cases to identify the mechanism for ameliorated conflict, detecting that the aid worker perceived that their close other appreciated and valued their work, what I came to call *occupational value homophily*. After identifying this trend in couples, I searched the data and also found illustrations of occupational value homophily with non-romantic close others, including friends and family. I found that these contexts of occupational value homophily

facilitated a strong emotional connection between the person in deeply meaningful work and their relationship partner that ameliorated the strain of conflict.

However, notwithstanding the outlier cases of occupational value homophily, throughout the third round of analysis I was struck by the fact that most aid workers described their work-relationship conflict in terms that expressed far more emotional turmoil than is captured by standard predictions, which emphasize time and energy strain. Featuring prominently in my data are illustrations of people experiencing self-described "emotional crisis" as they felt pulled to perform deeply meaningful work but acknowledged the tremendous cost it had in both broken and abandoned relationships. As I reviewed the literature on value homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954, p. 36), I answered the call to analyze these situations of tumult, returning to the data a fourth time to consider whether this was simply about time or energy strain, the dominant explanation in work-life theory. I identified that emotional turmoil arose in situations of *occupational value heterophily*, wherein people felt that their relationship partner did not value or appreciate a core avenue for their self-actualization – their work. Furthermore, as the close other did not find the self-transcendent aims important, it simply increased their resentment about the worker's absence. Rather than the work providing a counterbalance of emotional connection, I found that these situations resulted in work-induced resentment between the relationship partners which created emotional distance. This distance added emotional insult to the existing time-based and trust-based injury from work-relationship conflict, leading to a situation I call *work-relationship turmoil*. In this fourth pass through the data, I also identified that many aid workers engaged in extra-marital affairs and temporary relationships, often while traveling, to ameliorate the strain of work-relationship turmoil. This finding further validates the critical role played by occupational value homophily with close others, as people attempted to

seek occupational value homophily as a counterbalance to their work-relationship conflict in whatever way they could. The next section details these findings and the resulting conceptual model.

FINDINGS

The findings section proceeds in four parts. First, I present data that demonstrate two crucial, interactive components that lead people to experience their work as deeply meaningful – self-actualization and self-transcendence – with variation among participants in how meaningful they find the work. Next, I show how perceiving one's work as deeply meaningful inhibits boundary setting, increasing presence and availability at work and leading to absence and unreliability at home, resulting in work-relationship conflict. Third, I illustrate how occupational value homophily with close others – when close others similarly value and appreciate the work – facilitates an emotional connection in the relationship and layers an emotional understanding of the work-relationship interface on top of the time-based and trust-based experiences of conflict. Fourth, and finally, I show how in contexts of occupational value heterophily, the worker's attempts at self-actualization and self-transcendence through deeply meaningful work are perceived as unworthy of time and energy, creating an emotional distance in the relationship and exacerbating work-relationship conflict with additional emotional strain, leading to a state I call work-relationship turmoil. Figure 1 illustrates this process with a conceptual model of how deeply meaningful work influences both pragmatic and emotional layers of the work-relationship experience.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

Perceptions of Deeply Meaningful Work

The majority of participants (n=70, 85%) found their work deeply meaningful as a result of perceptions of both self-actualization and self-transcendence through work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). It was, in fact, the interactive effect of self-actualization and self-transcendence that elevated work to such deeply meaningful levels, where self-transcendence provided an avenue for amplified self-actualization. In contrast, the remaining participants (n=12, 15%) either did not perceive self-transcendence through their work, their work did not enable self-actualization, or they perceived neither of these aspects through their work. I describe each of the two dimensions, in turn beginning with self-transcendence, the feature most under-studied in meaningful work, but which I argue is crucial for deeply meaningful work.

Self-Transcendence. A sociological scholar of organizational theory and public administration, Philip Selznick (1957, p. 151) noted that day-to-day tasks at work can be infused with a grander sense of self-transcendent purpose through the elaboration of "socially integrating myths" that "state, in the language of uplift and idealism, what is distinctive about the aims and methods of the enterprise." This rhetoric is infused across the international aid sector, and is highlighted in recruitment efforts that announce, "We're determined to achieve dramatic change for the world's most vulnerable children" (Save the Children International) and "A career at CARE is … an opportunity to be a part of something that can help bring about lasting change in the world" (CARE). This rhetoric of self-transcendence successfully attracts aid workers to the industry, who often, in turn, derive a sense of meaningfulness from this aspect of their work. As two different respondents noted:

> I had to find moments in my work at [the past organization] I could kind of grasp on to and say this is meaningful and this is making a difference, but it was up to

> me to kind of figure that out. [In my new organization] the whole environment is such that I walk in and I feel like I'm part of a movement. [F30]
>
> I talk to people who are lawyers and they say, "Yes, it's intellectually stimulating, but I don't love it because, you know, there's no meaning – it's just what I do, and then I live the rest of my life." For me, the meaning is really important, being part of something that is meaningful. [M36]

Especially for participants that been employed across other industries, they found aid work to provide significant meaningfulness. The above participant left a for-profit advertising company to join the Peace Corps and mentioned, "now people see me as this incredible do-gooder, and I do derive pleasure from that appearance" [M36]. Society holds value for this work, which enables it to feel more meaningful to participants.

In contrast, other participants felt a disconnect between the proclaimed social value of their work and their perceptions of the actual value of their work, reducing the meaningfulness that work provided for them.

> [This work is] so difficult and so complicated, and this idea that you're going to do this one thing and transform the lives of millions of people just like that is not only naïve, it's infuriating at times. We need to get more realistic about what we can actually do, despite everyone outside the industry believing we're saints. [M16]
>
> I've become pretty cynical about aid in general. You probably know Nairobi's a real hub for NGOs, and there are tons of ex-pats driving around in shiny Land Rovers. It's humiliating. [M17]

The lofty aspirations of the international aid sector lure many people to want to participate. However, the disconnect between aspiration and reality can feel unbridgeable, resulting in feeling "infuriated" and "humiliated". These people often engaged in a cognitive reframing of their work as a job, rather than as a career, a vocation, or a calling.

Self-Actualization. The second component that facilitates deeply meaningful work is more proximal and subjective, allowing people to express their full potential. When the structure

and activities of work align with one's personal work values or motives, it can engender significant fulfillment.

> This is really my dream job. I'm so happy to be doing what I'm doing. The amount of fulfillment I get from the travel and from the work and from my colleagues really makes me more than satisfied in my job. [F33]

> My work is a big part of who I am and it's something that I really enjoy. I see progress and I see accomplishment and I see a large group of people working towards a common goal. To me there's a lot of self-fulfillment with that. [F28]

People who experience deeply meaningful work are not merely content with their employment, but they see it as "a big part of who I am." With this dimension, work serves as a vehicle to developing and becoming one's self, enabling one to answer the question, "does my work reflect and fulfill who I am?" (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). For many participants, their perceptions of deeply meaningful work are intimately tied to their sense of self and value expression. Many aid workers mentioned, "a lot of my identity is wrapped up in my international development environment world" [F44], "I really care about making a difference in the world, and my work allows me to do that" [F41], and "work has been a huge part of my life and my identity" [F30]. For many participants, aid work is experienced as deeply meaningful due to the simultaneous experience of self-transcendence and self-actualization (see also, Bailey & Madden, 2017; Bailey et al., 2017), living their values to be of service to others and, in this way, enacting their true selves.

This perfect storm was not experienced by all the respondents, however. Some people acknowledged the self-transcendence offered by their work, but given their particular position within the organization, they didn't feel that their work was personally enriching. One respondent ended our conversation with, "Helping people is something I really enjoy, but I enjoy

interacting directly with people, being creative, and being physically active, and I don't get to do any of that here." [F03] She continued,

> I started this book last week called, I don't know what I want but I know it's not this[: A step-by-step guide to finding gratifying work]. I want to reconcile [my work with] the things that I know I'm good at and the ways that I am fulfilled and come alive. I want to feel rewarded and stimulated and like, I don't know, creatively nourished by what I'm doing every day. [F03]

People who did not find their work meaningful often commented that they did acknowledge a sense of meaningfulness from the self-transcendent aims of the industry, but emphasized that the structure of the work did not draw upon their personal strengths or interest, thus thwarting their desires for self-actualization. For some, this was due to the intangible nature of many of the impacts of aid work. As one respondent mentioned, "Doing laundry, you see a finished product. When you work with people, you see growth in people, but it's just never done, which is hard for me personally." [M17] Most respondents who did not find their work deeply meaningful were grateful for a job that paid the bills and that fulfilled either self-actualization or self-transcendence, though the few participants that found neither attribute through their work were generally discontented and looking for alternative employment options (n=3).

Boundary Inhibition, Time-Based, and Trust-Based Work-Relationship Conflict

Those who find their work less meaningful are more likely to maintain boundaries between their work and the rest of their lives, resulting in work-relationship balance. In contrast, given the dual fulfillment of self-actualization and self-transcendence when experiencing deeply meaningful work, people described feeling "almost addicted" to the intensity of purpose they derive from their work. As a result, I found that participants were devoted to work and struggled

with boundary maintenance around work practices. One respondent who noted she works 70 hours in a “good week” reflected,

> There’s something about people in this field that our eyes are always bigger than our stomachs. […] There’s just something about the way people are coded. It’s just part of the DNA that we want to see good programs, and we want to help people. We take such pride in the work that you just want to be a continuous part of feeding that and having meaningful involvement and meaningful contribution into that. That means that it’s hard to find the “off” button. [F19]

The draw of meaningfulness pulls their mind into work on an ongoing basis. Above and beyond high work demands, people describe their work as unique in its ability to provide such deep meaningfulness and therefore finding it extraordinarily challenging to find the “off” button” and erect boundaries that would preserve time and energy for a non-work life (see also, Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

Many aid workers commented that this inhibition of boundaries was an embedded part of the institutional culture, often drawing upon the self-transcendence of the work to justify the extraordinarily long hours. “There's just this culture that we're doing work that's really important, that we're very lucky to have this job.” [M04] The concept of DNA-encoded boundary inhibition was simultaneously evoked on an individual- and organizational-level.

> This is not a place that naturally pulls you aside and reminds you "Go home early today. Take time. Say no. This is a beautiful opportunity but let's wait." It's not part of our core DNA and our instincts because we all have the grander mission in mind and care so deeply about these issues that we're working on. The collective culture here is usually like "We should do it, we should totally pursue it." [F08]

Drawing strongly on the self-transcendence frame, and the “grander mission” of the work, people struggled to limit their time at and availability to work. Moreover, the sense that participants “care deeply about the issues” and “take such pride in the work” enables self-actualization through work. As a result, “It’s just rampant throughout – people who go above and beyond, working evenings, working 5:00 a.m. phone calls, after 11:00 p.m. phone calls the night

before, working weekends." [F19] This inhibition of boundaries creates significant work-relationship conflict.

> Ultimately, I will end up with about, probably about 40 or 50 of my close colleagues really, really liking my work, and feeling like it is really meaningful, and my wife saying, "Why haven't you got any time for me and the kids?" [M04]

Though aid work is a greedy and precarious occupation, personal boundary inhibition exacerbates the already demanding and unpredictable nature of their work, resulting in aid workers spending more time and energy at work, exacerbating absence and a lack of dependability in close relationships.

Work-induced *absences* challenge the ability to sustain close relationships over time by disrupting routines and rhythms that appear to be the corner-stone of many long-term close relationships. As a 59-year-old man who had been married for over thirty years noted:

> You get accustomed to making your own decisions when you are away, and you need to get used to collaborating again when you come back together. There are a lot of things in relationships that are routine and that you don't have to think about much, but if you are constantly going back and forth, back and forth, then you lose those routines. It's not the best kind of situation. [M19]

Respondents express that their absence makes it difficult for their close other to rely upon them, detailing how the one who stays home learns to do things independently and the interactions that form the backbone of many relationships disappear. I suggest that this absence in personal relationships, due to the increased time spent at work, gives rise to time-based work-relationship conflict, akin to the time-based conflict experienced in many demanding, greedy occupations.

In addition to spending extraordinarily long hours at work, those experiencing deeply meaningful work additionally made themselves available at short notice for precarious and unpredictable work. This prioritization of availability to unpredictable work, however, often

results in a *lack of dependability* to people outside of work. When this becomes a pattern, it almost inevitably leads to conflict in relationships.

> In my social life, I feel like I'm always canceling on people. A lot of my trips come up without much notice, which is really, really hard, particularly when they're long-term trips. When I went to Mali, I had like ... Oh my god, that was horrible. I had like a week's notice to decide whether to go for a month, or it was less than a week even. [F33]

In the previous example, the participant's boss gave her the opportunity to choose whether to go on the trip, however – like most people in this study – she had a hard time saying no. Undertaking a work-related crisis often enables involvement in tremendously fulfilling and deeply meaningful work. Simultaneously, it inevitably leads to cancelling personal plans, large and small, leading to perceptions that the aid worker is unreliable to their close other. Almost every respondent recounted relationships that were lost or abandoned due to their dedication to work, including missing a father's sixtieth birthday party, not making it to a best friend's debut choir performance, or repeatedly rescheduling a romantic weekend away with a partner. Given that relationships require attention and care to build intimacy and trust (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), the lack of reliability results in a unique form of trust-based work-relationship conflict.

Though all the respondents who found their work meaningful experienced work-relationship conflict, the strain it puts on relationships results in gendered relationship patterns. Men appear less likely to support their female partners through periods of absence and inconsistency, resulting in a lower likelihood that female aid workers will have a committed relationship in comparison to male aid workers (63% versus 87% respectively). This finding is further substantiated through female respondents' acknowledgment of the high rate of female "trailing spouses" who decelerate their own careers to enable their husband to take the lead. These results support a large body of research demonstrating that the opportunity for egalitarian relationships is not equally available to women and men, given gendered conventions that the

worker is a man, whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job (Whyte, 1956), while his wife or another woman takes care of housework, childcare, and other domestic responsibilities (Acker, 1990, p. 149; Cooper, 2014; Stone, 2007). In the case of deeply meaningful work, it differentially influences womens' and mens' abilities to simultaneously experience deeply meaningful work and committed personal relationships. In contrast to gendered differences in relationship status, however, I find that among men and women in committed relationships, there are not gendered differences in occupational value homophily.

Occupational Value Homophily, Emotional Connection, and the Amelioration of Work-Relationship Conflict

Despite the ubiquitous occurrence of work-relationship conflict for those in deeply meaningful work, I find that the strain of this conflict is lessened in relationship contexts of occupational value homophily. Building on the concept of value homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954, p. 111), the tendency for relationships to form between those who are alike in some respect, I argue that an emotional connection is more likely to occur in close relationships with occupational value homophily, which I define as holding similar values, attitudes, and beliefs about the importance of one's work. The presence of occupational value homophily in the relationship context enables people to reconnect more effectively and intimately when they communicate, either in person or via technology.

While occupational value homophily enabled an emotional connection in all relationships, for people who find their work deeply meaningful (n=70), a relationship context of occupational value homophily results in a stronger emotional connection, while for the sub-set of the sample that did not perceive their work as meaningful (n=12), occupational value homophily

had a more subdued impact. I argue that occupational value homophily is more important for those in deeply meaningful work for two reasons, aligning with the two mutually reinforcing components that lend meaningfulness to work. First, in contexts of occupational value homophily the close other can appreciate that the worker's absence and unreliability is in service of self-transcendent aims, which they both agree are important. Second, given that the aid worker views her work as a vehicle for self-actualization, in relationships with occupational value homophily the close other simultaneously express an appreciation for the worker herself which facilitates a warm connection within the relationship. Occupational value homophily does not negate underlying work-relationship conflict, but given the intimate value- and identity-based ties that people have with deeply meaningful work, it layers an emotional component of the work-relationship experience on top of it.

While the underlying work-relationship conflict may be higher in situations of occupational homophily (ie. when both people do the same work), it also increases the probability for and strength of occupational value homophily. When occupational value homophily occurs in the context of occupational homophily, not only do people value and appreciate their close other's work, but they fully understand the details of the work. A female aid worker who was married to a male aid worker conveyed the following,

> When one or the other is traveling, it's not a tremendous burden. He may be gone for a few weeks in Haiti. […] It's not like he's doing it for GE [General Electric Company], and I'm like, "Why are you on these trips?" I know exactly what he's doing and, to be honest, I think its important. […] That just enriches our relationship. [F19]

The respondent's belief in the importance of the work enriches their relationship. Though the underlying work-relationship conflict is not reduced, the work-induced emotional connection reverberates back to lessen the strain. Moreover, I find that this is not simply about reciprocity, wherein close others simply trade taking time away. This respondent contrasts their relationship

with the possibility of being partnered with someone who has the same travel schedule but for GE, a multinational corporation, and how this would not lead to the same emotional connection in their relationship because she would be asking "why are you on these trips?", implying that she doesn't value or appreciate the work that GE is doing. Occupational value homophily results in significant conflict mitigation in this relationship because of the mutual perception of importance for deeply meaningful work.

People also discussed the presence of occupational value homophily in relationships without occupational homophily, in this case with non-aid workers. Often, the close other was similarly engaged in work they found deeply meaningful, generally in occupations that also had high potential for self-transcendence and self-actualization.

> I met my now husband [...] in Washington [...] He worked at the Center for Global Development, so he is interested in international development-type work, but a little more academic perspective. He applied to PhD programs and ended up getting into Yale. I feel like it is particularly important if international development is an interest to find somebody in life that shares that interest. [F35]

> I married the perfect person for me, because she believes in the mission of [my organization]. Even if she's not working for them, she knows; she worked as a Peace Corps volunteer. She's not "material-driven," so it's okay that I make $55,000 a year. [M29]

Sharing a belief in the importance of one's work enables one to be a "perfect" partner.

Occupational value homophily can also exist across disparate occupations or industries, when the relationship partners align in both valuing and appreciating the other's work, but for different reasons. As one respondent commented about his partner who worked in finance, "we joke that he'll keep us in comfortable in this life, and I'll get us into heaven [[small laugh]]. Our karma is net zero" [M36]. The respondent found his own work deeply meaningful, felt his work was valued by his husband, and also valued what his husband's work brought to the relationship. In these contexts, occupational value homophily similarly facilitated the value of and an

appreciation for the other person's professional pursuits, enabling a warm emotional connection within their relationship that mitigated the strain of time-based and trust-based work-relationship conflict.

Occupational Value Heterophily, Emotional Distance, and Work-Relationship Turmoil

In contrast to relationship contexts of occupational value homophily, aid workers in close relationships with *occupational value heterophily* report feeling ostracized or alienated within their homes and relationships, as their close other doesn't value or appreciate their work. For individuals who find deeply meaningful work is an avenue for self-actualization and self-transcendence, this is especially painful as they feel that their close other rejects a key part of their identity. I find that occupational value heterophily with close others can result in a situation of emotional distance within the relationship, and that this emotionally fraught state further exacerbates the work-relationship conflict caused by absence and unreliability, leading to a situation I call *work-relationship turmoil.*

Respondents who were in romantic relationships with occupational value heterophily often had met many years before the participant found deeply meaningful work. Frequently, the resulting work-relationship turmoil ultimately lead to the dissolution of the relationship. An illustrative example is offered by the following respondent, who was divorced at the time of the interview, and dating a new partner. She reflected upon the development of her relationship with her first husband:

> I had been dating someone before I went to Peace Corps. Really good guy. We were both in the forest service and enjoyed many of the same things. Then I got over to Honduras, where I did my [Peace Corps] service, and absolutely loved what I was doing. I had no interest in any of the men that were there, but my boyfriend was worried that I would find someone like me and run off with him. Basically, in order to reassure him that I wasn't going anywhere, we got engaged. Then, nine months later, we decided to get married. [F28]

This respondent highlighted that she and her ex-husband "enjoyed many of the same things" but also differentiated that from "find[ing] someone like [her]." She described how her career then unfolded, characterized by both geographic mobility and increasingly important positions across aid organizations, leading to significant physical absence and work-relationship conflict. Though he was supportive of her traveling for work, his disregard for the importance of her work was emotionally difficult for her. Although she flew home to see him as often as possible, thus reducing the underlying physical absence, "there was a breakdown in communication and we just—we weren't communicating." Though the travel and physical distance were difficult, as they each felt "increasingly alienated", she identified the emotional distance as the leading precursor to the dissolution of their relationship. Rather than fostering a warm personal attachment, relationship contexts of occupational value heterophily are rather characterized by motivated avoidance resulting from a series of reciprocally induced crises, in which each person's actions evoke hostility in the other (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954).

Complementing challenged romantic relationships, some respondents had spouses with whom they shared occupational value homophily, but experienced value heterophily with friends and family. As one respondent commented,

> In the 15 years I've been doing [aid work], I've gotta be honest with you, they have no idea what I do. […] Either they think I'm a spy, or they think that we just go hand out items for kids. That's my fault, too, that I've never been able to communicate it effectively. […] Without that understanding, it's hard for them to appreciate what I do, so it's just the resentment that I'm never around. That's hard because I feel like they don't really get who I am, because what I do for work is a big part of who I am. [F19]

This respondent expressed a common sentiment among those in deeply meaningful work whose relationships with close others were characterized by occupational value heterophily – a sense that their close other did not "get" who they were, since they did not "get" the value of their

work. In relationships contexts of occupational value heterophily, when a close other doesn't similarly value, appreciate, or understand the work, the worker experiences this as a rejection of their self. Importantly, occupational value heterophily does not simply result in the absence of an emotional connection; rather, given the worker's devotion to their work, it actively generates a work-induced emotional distance in the relationship. In many instances, aid workers eventually stop trying to bridge the distance, acquiescing to relationships that lack emotional connection. Coupled with underlying work-relationship conflict, this intensely emotional work-relationship turmoil often leads to relationship dissolution, sometimes spurred by temporary relationships that are utilized to alleviate the anguish.

The Search for Occupational Value Homophily. People in deeply meaningful work acknowledge that occupational value homophily with close others is a conflict mitigation tool and actively seek close value homophilous relationships, both through the pursuit of longer-term, sustaining relationships with friends, family, and significant others, as mentioned above, but also through more temporary occupationally value homophilous relationships, which I discuss in more detail here. These findings strengthen and substantiate the role of occupational value homophily in moderating the experience of work-relationship conflict for people in deeply meaningful work.

Aid workers who have an occupationally value heterophilous relationship at home are often physically surrounded by "people who are more like-minded than the person you are married to" [F28] while at work. This set of circumstances leads to a reality, described by one respondent as, "pretty much an industry-wide acceptance of temporary relationships" [M38]. Furthermore, I find that temporary relationships are not simply an outlet for sexual frustration, but have intimate emotional components. For people driven by their devotion to deeply

meaningful work, the opportunity to be in the company of someone who shares their commitment to self-actualization and self-transcendence through work can feel life sustaining. As a result, most respondents mentioned the prevalence of temporary relationships in the industry, and some even acknowledged that infidelity occurred at some point during their career.

> You are working long hours together, there's that work bond. But there's also a play bond, because that is one of your few emotional outlets, and that's fairly intense. [M38]

The ability to mitigate the strain of work with a "play bond" with someone who values and appreciates the work is a welcome relief for many. This search for occupational value homophily through temporary relationships was an intentional strategy utilized by workers to mitigate the strain of work-relationship conflict, however it was also one which often eventually triggered the dissolution of their relationship at home.

CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Research has acknowledged the double-edged sword of deeply meaningful work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), but not been able to fully explain the repercussions for close personal relationships outside of work. I identify two important mechanisms, which I detail here – boundary inhibition and occupational value homophily.

Boundary Inhibition in Deeply Meaningful Work

People in deeply meaningful work often dedicate themselves fully to the workplace as a source for self-actualization and self-transcendence, eroding any natural instinct towards boundary maintenance around work time (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Kreiner et al., 2009). I identify this *boundary inhibition* as a crucial mechanism that helps explain the experience of work-relationship conflict for people in deeply meaningful work. With this more nuanced lens, we come to understand that the work and relationship domains are not merely competing for

time and attention, they are also competing to provide a sense of purpose to one's life. People in deeply meaningful work often thrive on the intensity, energy, and sense of transcendence that their work offers them, but may sacrifice their relationships in the process – like moths drawn to a flame, the source of purpose may also become the weapon of harm. Consequently, the unique challenges of work-relationship conflict in deeply meaningful work may be not adequately addressed by traditional mitigation strategies of increased control and flexibility offered by work-family scholars (Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, 2011).

The insight of boundary inhibition for those in deeply meaningful work enriches research on work-family conflict, as well, which generally assumes that people experience conflict as a result of involuntary participation in overwork. My findings thus identify an intimate and entangled relationship between deeply meaningful work and work that is greedy or precarious. My claim is thus: while greedy or precarious work is seldom experienced as deeply meaningful, people who experience their work as deeply meaningful may be more likely to allow their workplace to be more greedy and precarious.

Occupational Value Homophily with Close Others

I identify the conditions under which deeply meaningful work has a positive effect on close personal relationships – occupational value homophily with close others. This finding may modify predictions from research on attention residue (Leroy, 2009), suggesting that in relationship contexts of occupational value homophily the attention residue from work may potentially serve as a bridge which enables successful transition between deeply meaningful work and close personal relationships without disengagement. Occupational value homophily may also be interpreted as an avenue for work-relationship enrichment, advancing research

which suggests that work-relationship enrichment can exist in tandem with work-relationship conflict (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Gareis, Barnett, Ertel, & Berkman, 2009).

Given the increased numbers of people seeking meaningful work (Twenge et al., 2010; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002) and the rising prevalence of finding close friends and even spouses at work (Drexler, 2014), I suggest that occupational value homophily may be a uniquely modern and increasingly salient form of value homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). Prior research has demonstrated that work increasingly structures our private lives, even configuring the way we think of leisure time (Hochschild, 1997). This study expands those impacts to the mediation of our close relationships and the satisfaction we gather from them, as deeply meaningful work becomes a central life domain and, potentially, the dominant axis of value homophily with close others, above other values and interests that people enjoy in leisure time, such as sports, arts, religion, ethnicity, or other hobbies (Huston & Levinger, 1978). Though people have always preferred to spend their time with those who are similar (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001) and organizations have long been a natural environment for romantic relationships (Quinn, 1977), in a context of increasingly specialized work, occupational value homophily may draw boundaries around a more tightly defined pool of available candidates for satisfying close relationships (see also Hogg, 1992; Hogg & Turner, 1985). As a result, the salience of occupational value homophily could potentially result in broken relationships with family and childhood friends, and make it difficult to form meaningful relationships with new neighbors, should they not understand and appreciate the importance of deeply meaningful work.

Finally, extending previous work (Bergmann et al., 2014; Ilies et al., 2011), I show how relationships with occupational value heterophily actively generate a work-induced emotional distance in the relationship, especially for people in deeply meaningful work for whom their

work is an expression of both self-actualization and self-transcendence. Capturing the emotional distance on top of the physical distance more accurately describes the reality of work-relationship conflict, which I call *work-relationship turmoil*. Insodoing, this study highlights both the difficult pragmatic considerations around boundary inhibition leading to increased work-relationship conflict, as well as the emotionally-tumultuous experience of work-relationship turmoil for those in deeply meaningful work without counter-balancing personal relationships that value and appreciate their work, providing crucial mechanisms to further examine and explain the dark side of deeply meaningful work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

GENERALIZABILITY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

Though generated in an intense workplace that is both greedy and precarious, the insights from this study likely have broader generalizability to workplaces that are greedy or precarious. While the amplitude of the findings may be different in an alternate setting, the main mechanisms are expected to generalize to people who find their work deeply meaningful across a range of occupational domains (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). It remains for future work to more intricately tease apart the varied experiences of workers who find their work *deeply* meaningful – resulting from synergistic fulfillment of both self-actualization and self-transcendence – versus those who may find their work *merely* meaningful resulting from fulfillment of only one dimension, self-actualization or self-transcendence. In addition, while I found that gender did not have unique effects on the experience of work-relationship conflict in deeply meaningful work, I encourage future scholars to investigate gender and deeply meaningful work in more depth. Furthermore, this study largely focuses on deeply meaningful work in a context with high work demands, including significant travel, however given that expatriation has unique impacts on the work-family interface (Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010; Mäkelä, Suutari, & Brewster,

2014), it would be fruitful to more deeply probe the intersections between various forms of international mobility and deeply meaningful work in the future.

This paper identifies how relationship context influences varying experiences of work-relationship conflict for those in deeply meaningful work. Future scholars can and should investigate how a shared orientation to what is important about work may mitigate or exacerbate conflict in other relationships and settings. A useful extension to this study would be an examination of how variance in occupational value homophily or heterophily within the broader socio-cultural context influences the resulting relative salience of occupational value alignment within the relationship context. For example, perhaps if people found their work deeply meaningful and had strong affirmation regarding the importance of their work from social norms, the necessity for a relationship context with occupational value homophily may be reduced. I encourage future scholars to identify and analyze these interactive dimensions. Furthermore, building on the emerging body of work that explicitly examines couple dyads (Bergmann et al., 2014; Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013), it would likely be promising to interview close others regarding their perceptions of work-relationship conflict and occupational value homophily, for example investigating whether the relationship partner appreciates the worker and senses an emotional connection. As prior work has found conflicting evidence regarding the experience of forming close relationships with colleagues (Horan & Chory, 2011), it may also prove insightful to include cases where close others work for the same organization. Finally, the dynamism of occupational value homophily within a relationship context over time deserves attention. Past research has shown that proximity can lead to interest (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954), suggesting that close others' may develop increased occupational value homophily over time in partnership with those in deeply meaningful work. Alternatively, however, high degrees

of time-based or trust-based work-relationship conflict may lead a close other who originally held occupational value homophily to shift their perspective, thus decreasing occupational value homophily over time. I encourage scholars to examine these interactive and competing hypotheses.

Future scholarship can and should examine the impact of boundary inhibition and occupational value homophily across alternative settings to test how well the conceptual mechanisms travel. It is my hope that the current framework will help to deepen knowledge and guide future research regarding work-relationship conflict and deeply meaningful work, arguably two of the most salient considerations that professional workers and organizations are grappling with today.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Though organizations have generally capitalized on the additional labor that people freely offer when they find their work deeply meaningful (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004), this paper also demonstrates the significant "dark side" with respect to work-relationship conflict. As work-relationship conflict has significant negative implications for employers, including absenteeism, organizational commitment, job performance, and turnover intentions, as well as giving rise to a range of stress-related outcomes for employees, including depression, substance abuse, burnout, and a multitude of negative physical symptoms (Allen et al., 2000), the double-edged sword of deeply meaningful work needs to be a crucial consideration for both organizations and their employees.

The insights developed in this paper refine strategies of flexibility or task-completion as avenues to reduce work-relationship conflict, wherein workers manage their own timing around completing work responsibilities (Kelly et al., 2011). I raise the possibility that these solutions

may be less effective for people in deeply meaningful work because boundary inhibition makes it difficult to set the work down. Instead, the current findings suggest that organizations should adopt more broad-based cultural norms, modeled by leadership, that encourage boundary maintenance. In addition, for employees seeking more occupational value homophily in their relationships with close others, adopting a stance of humility with respect to work and an openness to patiently share that with others, while also actively listening to and appreciating the primary interests of the relationship partner, may assist in helping others better understand and appreciate the work.

CONCLUSION

People are drawn to spend their physical time and emotional energy in the areas they value most greatly and where they feel most valued (Hochschild, 1997). It is in this way that we live a life that feels meaningful. Unfortunately, both work and home domains may compete for this time and energy, and as a result, compete for being a source of meaningfulness in life. Engagement in deeply meaningful work can result in individual fulfillment and, when the stars align, may also result in deeply connected close relationships. However, in relationships of occupational value heterophily, deeply meaningful work may add insult to injury and strain existing relationships, while also making it very difficult to form new ones, thus eroding the substance of private life in service of gains at work.

Appendix A1. Detail on interview respondents.

Code	Age	Relationship Status	Aid Worker Spouse	# Children	Terminal Degree	Nationality
M01	46	Married	Yes	1	MA	United States
M02	50	Married	No	2	BA	Mexico
M03	48	Single	N/A	0	MA	United Kingdom
M04	43	Married	Yes	2	BA	United Kingdom
M05	37	Married	No	0	MA	Canada
M06	37	Single	N/A	0	PhD	United States
M07	48	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
M08	50	Single	N/A	0	MA	South Africa
M09	48	Married	No	1	PhD	United States
M10	49	Committed	No	0	MA	Belgium
M11	42	Married	No	0	JD	China
M12	36	Married	No	0	MA	India
M13	42	Married	Yes	1	MA	India
M14	37	Married	No	0	BA	Poland
M15	58	Married	No	1	MA	India
M16	38	Committed	No	0	JD	United States
M17	41	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
M18	46	Married	No	2	MA	Malawi
M19	59	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
M20	36	Married	Yes	0	MA	Canada
M21	37	Married	No	1	MA	Italian
M22	47	Married	No	2	BA	Pakistan
M23	49	Married	No	1	MA	Guatemala
M24	48	Single	N/A	0	MA	United States
M25	61	Married	No	2	MA	United States
M26	64	Married	No	0	MA	Italy
M27	40	Married	No	2	MA	United States
M28	45	Committed	Yes	0	MA	Australia
M29	34	Married	No	0	MA	United States
M30	43	Married	Yes	2	MA	India
M31	51	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
M32	36	Married	Yes	1	MA	United Kingdom
M33	62	Married	Yes	0	PhD	United States

Appendix A1 (continued). Detail on interview respondents.

Code	Age	Relationship Status	Aid Worker Spouse	# Children	Terminal Degree	Nationality
M34	40	Committed	No	0	MA	France
M35	32	Married	Yes	0	MA	United States
M36	34	Committed	No	0	MA	United States
M37	32	Single	N/A	0	BA	Germany
M38	35	Married	Yes	0	MA	United States
M41	38	Committed	No	0	MA	United States
F01	44	Married	No	2	MA	United States
F02	44	Single	N/A	0	MA	Ecuador
F03	34	Single	N/A	0	MA	United States
F04	36	Single	N/A	0	MA	Germany
F05	43	Married	Yes	2	PhD	United States
F06	48	Single	N/A	1	PhD	United States
F07	44	Married	No	0	MA	United States
F08	45	Married	No	2	BA	United States
F09	32	Committed	No	0	JD	United States
F10	32	Committed	No	0	MA	United States
F11	39	Committed	No	0	JD	United States
F12	56	Married	No	2	BA	United States
F13	36	Married	No	0	MA	Thailand
F14	53	Married	No	0	BA	United States
F15	54	Single	N/A	0	BA	United States
F16	29	Committed	No	0	BA	United States
F17	63	Committed	No	2	BA	United Kingdom
F18	49	Divorced	N/A	1	MA	United States
F19	39	Married	Yes	0	MA	United States
F20	44	Married	No	2	MA	Turkey
F21	64	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
F22	41	Single	N/A	0	MA	United States
F23	33	Single	N/A	0	MA	United States
F24	37	Single	N/A	0	MA	United States
F25	30	Single	N/A	0	BA	United Kingdom
F26	35	Married	No	0	MA	Pakistan

Appendix A1 (continued). Detail on interview respondents.

Code	Age	Relationship Status	Aid Worker Spouse	# Children	Terminal Degree	Nationality
F27	40	Single	N/A	0	BA	United States
F28	42	Committed	No	2	MA	United States
F29	37	Divorced	No	2	MA	United States
F30	42	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
F31	28	Single	N/A	0	BA	United States
F32	38	Married	No	0	PhD	United States
F33	30	Single	N/A	0	MA	United States
F34	41	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
F35	33	Married	Yes	0	MA	United States
F36	43	Married	No	2	MA	Kenya
F37	37	Committed	No	0	BA	United States
F38	74	Separated	N/A	1	PhD	United States
F39	34	Married	No	0	MA	United States
F40	38	Married	No	2	MA	United States
F41	36	Married	No	1	MA	United States
F43	53	Married	No	2	MA	United States
F44	50	Divorced	N/A	1	MA	United States

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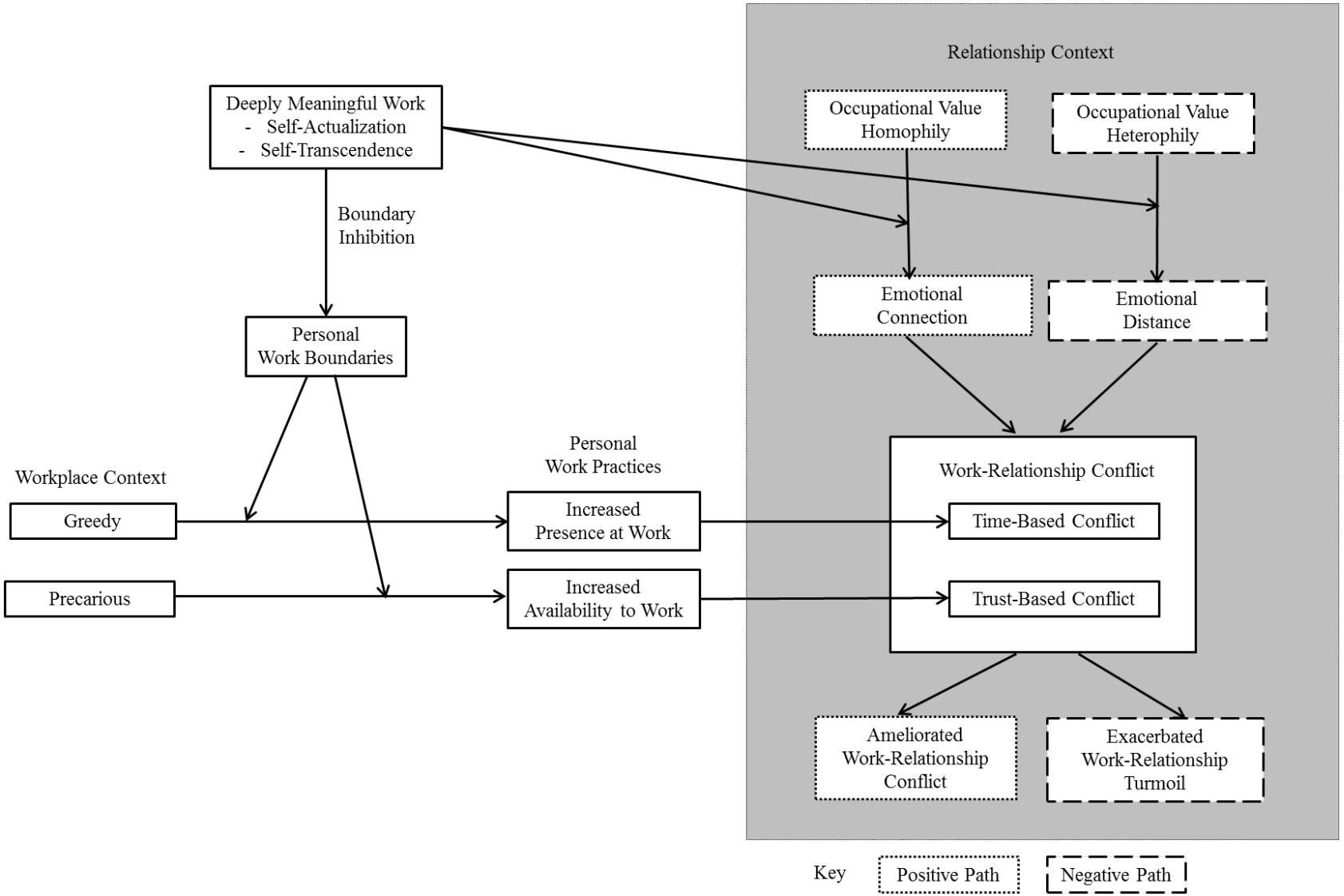
Table 1. Demographic overview of survey population and interview sample

	Population			Interview Sample		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Gender	132 (44.3%)	166 (55.7%)	298	39 (47.6%)	43 (52.4%)	82
Age						
Min	31	27	27	32	28	28
Max	69	74	74	64	74	74
Mean	47.9 (S.D. = 9.2)	43.7 (S.D. = 10.1)	45.6 (S.D. = 9.9)	44.3 (S.D. = 8.5)	42.1 (S.D. = 9.4)	42.6 (S.D. = 9.1)
Nationality						
U.S.	45 (34.1%)	104 (62.7%)	149 (50.0%)	17 (43.6%)	35 (81.4%)	52 (63.4%)
Non-U.S.	87 (65.9%)	62 (37.3%)	149 (50.0%)	22 (56.4%)	8 (18.6%)	30 (36.6%)
Relationship Status						
Single	15 (5.0%)	42 (25.3%)	57 (19.1%)	5 (12.8%)	12 (28.0%)	17 (20.1%)
Committed	16 (12.1%)	18 (10.8%)	34 (11.4%)	6 (15.4%)	7 (16.3%)	13 (15.9%)
Aid-Worker Spouse	2 (14.3%)	3 (16.7%)	5 (15.6%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0%)	1 (8.3%)
Married	98 (74.2%)	91 (54.8%)	189 (63.4%)	28 (71.8%)	20 (46.6%)	48 (58.6%)
Aid-Worker Spouse	22 (22.4%)	23 (25.2%)	45 (25.2%)	10 (25.6%)	6 (18.2%)	16 (47.1%)
Parental Status						
Current Parent	82 (62.5%)	81 (48.8%)	163 (54.3%)	18 (50.0%)	19 (44.2%)	37 (45.1%)
Future Desire for Kids	33 (24.4%)	63 (36.0%)	96 (32.0%)	16 (41.0%)	21 (48.8%)	37 (45.1%)

Figure 1. Model of how work-relationship conflict is experienced by people in deeply meaningful work



ENDNOTES

[1] While close relationships can include romantic or sexual intimacy, the primary focus of a close relationship is emotional intimacy. Furthermore, while not all close relationships are functionally beneficial or of a high quality (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002), I assume that those pursuing close relationships would prefer high quality close relationships, yet for readability, I do not write “high quality close relationships”.